

## **Stranger Stories: A Collection of One-shots by Michael-hearteyes-wheeler**

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**Summary:** Each chapter is based off of a short single sentence prompt. Lots of friendship bonding between party members, Hopper and El's relationship as family, and a LOT of Mileven fluff. These stories take place during the year 1985, after the gate is closed and life finally starts to feel normal again. Rated T for mild violence and swearing!

# 1. Chapter 1

**Hello Everyone! So this is going to be a compilation of different Stranger Things ones-shots all based on a short one sentence prompt. Most are going to be fluffy Mileven, but you will get to see all of the characters as they bond together. I thought with the upcoming holiday I would start with this one. I hope you enjoy!**

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## 124. "Happy New Year!"

December 31st, 1984.

As Hopper pulled up to Joyce's house on New Years Eve, he was already regretting every having agreed to this. El practically threw open her passenger side door before even he shut the engine off.

"Whoa whoah whoa, kid slow down! Your friends are going to be in there no matter how quickly you get inside now hold on. We need to go over the rules."

El groaned and reluctantly closed the door again, crossed her arms over her chest.

"Now remember what I said-" Hopper started, secretly procrastinating going inside for as long as he could.

"Yeah I remember! Be good, no powers." She huffed.

"And?" Hopper raised an eyebrow at her, she had cleverly forgotten the most important part.

"No kissing at midnight." She grumbled under her breath with an eye roll. Hopper felt the corners of his mouth tug up, she had really gotten the whole 'bratty teenager' thing down.

"That right. Now you go on ahead." He shut the engine off and before he could even pull his keys out, she was running towards the Byers front door.

Hopper chuckles to himself, lighting a cigarette and following slowly behind his adoptive daughter. When Joyce had suggested throwing a small new years eve party, El nearly jumped out of her skin from excitement. Hopper didn't think it was a good idea, but she was already so over the moon about it that he couldn't say no. So here he was, avoiding going inside and preferring the bitter cold. The holidays were always odd and confusing for him, it made him miss Sarah more than he would like to admit, but watching El get to enjoy them for the first time had softened him. This was her first new years party and despite Hopper hating parties, and crowds, and festive normalities, she deserved every second of it.

El was greeted at the door by an already red faced Mike. She pulled him into a big hug and together they went inside. All of the boys welcomed her warmly, as well as Max who gave her an awkward half wave and a smile. Joyce ran out from the kitchen, holding two glasses of wine and hugged the small girl.

"Where is Jim?" Joyce asked puzzled.

El rolled her eyes and pointed a thumb out onto the porch. "He is being weird."

Joyce fished a cigarette from her purse and walked outside, wine in hand.

El looked around the house and marveled at how beautiful the decorations looked. While Hopper had put up a small tree in their living room so El could have the 'authentic experience'; The Byers tree was huge, and had enough lights to illuminate a small town. El ran her fingers through the silvery tinsel that glinted in the multicolored lights, and smiled at the 'Happy New Years!' banner that Will had undoubtedly drawn and hung above the couch.

The boys, El, and Max all sat around the living room, catching up and joking. El was only allowed to see them on special occasions, and she loved hearing all of their stories each time they met up. To the boys it was just school, and chores, and annoying siblings, but to El it was a magical world that she had never been a part of.

El and Mikes hands found each others on the couch, and they tangled

together making both kids blush. Hopper said no kissing, but not 'no hand holding'. Mike told El all about the D&D campaign he was working on, and how excited he was for her to be able to play with them when she was allowed out more. El felt a twinge of pain in her heart, she had waited so long to be able to see them, but she had to wait even longer to be able to spend *real* time with them.

The hours tickled by and before anyone knew it, it was almost midnight. Joyce turned down the music and ran into the dining room, coming back seconds later with noise makers, and party blowers, and handed them out to everyone. She turned the TV to the station broadcasting the Times Square Ball Drop, and everyone gathered around the living room to watch. They were only about half an hour away and anticipation was killing them.

"So what are everyone new year's resolutions?" Max asked.

"Resolutions?" El asked.

"Yeah it means something new you are going to start doing in the new year. Like a promise you make to yourself." Mike answered beaming at her.

"Well I want to get a real job this year." Lucas said proudly.

"I'm gonna get my top score in Dig Dug back!" Dustin said sternly, eyeing Max.

"In your dreams!" She teased, tossing a pillow at him. "I'm gonna finally master the Switch Kickflip. I almost have it down and this year i'm gonna nail it."

"I think I want to actually finish drawing a comic book this year. I have so many that I started but never finished, and my mom just got me a bunch of new colored pencils for Christmas." Will said smiling over at his sprawled utensils and drawings that covered the coffee table. "What about you Mike?"

Mike had actually given this a lot of thought over the past few weeks. Knowing that El was back, and that she was okay had pulled him from his nearly year long funk in her absence. He wanted to see her

as often as he could, but that wasn't exactly resolution he was willing to share. He wanted to make sure she had the best year of her life, but that wasn't really a personal goal. Ultimately he just wanted everything to be okay, and for El to finally live the life she deserved, but that wasn't really something he could just tell everyone.

"Uh... I guess It would be cool to win the science fair this year." He said, obviously bluffing.

"That's it?" Lucas asked clearly not buying this excuse for a resolution. Mike just shrugged.

"Well what about you El? Is there anything you want to do in the upcoming year?" He asked changing the subject.

El thought about the question for a moment. There were a lot of things she wanted to do in the new year. She wanted to see her friends, to be able to go outside, to meet new people, to experience new things. She wanted to memorize every word in her dictionary, she wanted to watch all of the movies the boys had told her about, she wanted to finally play D&D with them. She wanted to do anything and everything because it was all so new and exciting, and part of her worried an entire year wouldn't be enough time for her to achieve all of her goals. She looked at Mike, and at her friends who all waited patiently for her answer, and it suddenly became clear to her what she wanted most of all.

"I want everyone to be safe and happy." She said earnestly, feeling slightly embarrassed. She looked into the expectant eyes of her friends and they all met her gaze with warm adoration.

Mike beamed at her, feeling his heart do flip flops in his chest. After everything she had gone through she just wanted everyone else to be happy? He opened his mouth to say something but was interrupted by Joyce yelling at the TV.

"It's almost time! Everyone get ready!" She grabbed Hoppers hand, pulling him into the living room. Jonathan and Nancy joined too, holding their noise makers at the ready. The party stood up, crowding together and staring at the small TV screen as the shimmering sphere began its descent.

5!... 4!... 3!... 2!... 1!

The room erupted with the sounds of whistling, cheering, clapping and loud rattling. The crowd on the TV cheered too, sounding like a sea of excitement. Jonathan and Nancy shared a sweet kiss, still spinning their noise makers and breaking away in a fit of excited laughter.

Joyce turned to Hopper and grabbed his face firmly in her hands, planting a kiss halfway between his cheek and his lips. He laughed and pulled her into a warm hug.

Dustin and Will pulled the strings of a confetti cannon, sending colorful paper swirling throughout the room. They cheered loudly, batting at the shimmering paper and hugging each other.

In the commotion, Max turned to Lucas, pulling the party blower from his lips and kissing him firmly through a smile. They broke apart and blushed, and for the first time, Lucas leaned forward and kissed *her*. Her eyes widened and she punched him arm playfully.

All of the noise had startled El at first, but she quickly gave in to the excitement. She stood mouth agape, staring at the floating confetti, it looked like a snowy rainbow. She turned to watch a particular piece of glitter fall and land in Mike's wavy hair. She giggled to see he had pieces of paper sticking this way and that all over his messy locks. He stepped towards her, closing the little space between them and hugged her tightly, still staring into her eyes. She felt a warmth rush over her cheeks, and it matched the redness growing across Mike's face as well. He smiled crookedly at her and lowered his face to hers.

She knew she wasn't supposed to kiss Mike at midnight, but it was worth getting in trouble over. She closed the gap between them and met him in the middle with a soft kiss. It was the longest one they had shared yet, and after they pulled apart they stayed close together, hugging each other tightly as their friends continued cheering around them.

"Happy New Years, El." Mike said, smiling warmly at her.

"Happy New Years, Mike." She whispered. El felt her heart twist at

the sight of his grin, freckles back-lit in red blush, and loving gaze. He was so pretty, and she relished the moments like this, when she felt truly safe and happy with him.

Now that she got to feel what it was like to be with him again, she knew she could never let that feeling go. No one was going to stop her from being with her friends, not the goons from the lab, not Papa, not even Hopper; Because no matter how stupid it might be, no matter how dangerous it might get, she never felt more safe than she did now; Standing cheek to cheek with Mike, and laughing along with the people she loved most.

1985 was going to be a good year, El would make sure of it.

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**Hope you liked it! I know this one was short but others will be longer. If you want to request a one-shot based on your own unique prompt please leave it in the reviews! Or you can find the original '1-150 drabble challenge' prompt list yourself and request a specific number. Thanks so much and see you next time!**

**-Allie**

## 2. Chapter 2

### 117. "Can I do your hair?"

"Oh my god, El! I'm so excited!" Nancy squealed, pulling a very reluctant Eleven in for a hug. "Your first real sleepover! It's going to be so fun I have the entire night planned out."

Nancy had been running around her bedroom for almost an hour, straightening things up and pushing furniture out of the way to make room for sleeping bags on the floor. The older girl had been practically over the moon about this entire thing since the moment El agreed to it.

Eleven still wasn't very keen on whole situation. Sure it sounded fun enough to have a 'girls night' with Nancy, but El didn't know that that meant there would actually be other girls, or rather one other girl in particular.

Max and El were still on uncertain terms. The fiery haired girl had tried a number of times to get through to El, but she just would budge. She had spent an entire year alone missing her friends so badly that it physically hurt and now here was this new girl to take her place. The truth was that El was jealous, even if she didn't know it.

As if on cue, the doorbell rang downstairs. El groaned and flopped back on nancy's bed.

"Oh come on, shes not that bad." Nancy scolded playfully. "Will you go get the door?"

El groaned louder this time, but begrudgingly headed downstairs. El opened the door slowly and gave Max a half-hearted smile. She was almost pleased to see that Max looked just as uncomfortable, skateboard in one hand, overnight bag in the other.

"Hey, El." She said weakly. El said nothing but stepped aside to let the girl in.



They both made their way upstairs to find a nosey Mike peeking out at them from his bedroom door. He blushed and slammed his door closed again. He had been given a strict warning from Nancy that this was a girls only sleepover and there were no boys, brothers, or boyfriends allowed. Since he was all three is was tripply confined to his room.

Despite the awkward tension, the night continued on without incident. They watched a few romantic comedies that Nancy liked, and one slasher flick that Max had brought. They ate popcorn, drank soda, painted their nails, and even played a couple rounds of truth or dare. It seemed like everyone was having a decent time.

As it got later, and the girls settled into Nancy's room, the conversation quickly became less playful and more serious.

Nancy opened up about her relationship with Jonathan, giving the younger girls advice they would surely come to need later. Max briefly went into her situation at home, and her asshole step-brother. Even El spoke up about her year in isolation, and the pain that it caused her.

"That must have been really hard." Max said earnestly, reaching out and putting a hand on Els shoulder.

The sudden contact while feeling so vulnerable made El uneasy. She shifted away from max with a bit more malice than she may have intended, pushing the girls hand off of her shoulder and curling her legs into her chest.

Max was shocked. Here she was trying to be nice, and lend some support, and what did she get in return? A big fat cold shoulder. She snapped, her fiery temper taking over.

"El why do you hate me so much!?" She demanded. El shot her a confused glance, and then looked to Nancy for support

"I... dont hate you." El replied sheepishly.

"Then why are you rude to me all the time?" Max crossed her arms.

"I... I wasn't trying to be rude."

"Well you sure as hell weren't trying to be nice!"

El considered the girl for a moment, trying to find the right words to express how she felt. She really didn't hate Max, far from it actually. Tonight had proved that they had a lot in common, and that they could get along pretty well if they tried, but it just felt so foreign.

"I was just..." She searched for the right word. "Jealous."

"Jealous? Of me? You have got to be kidding." Max scoffed.

El nodded, curling further into herself, avoiding eye contact.

"That is seriously the stupidest thing I have ever heard." Max laughed but her words made El want to cry. "Because from the moment I met the guys all they did was talk about you. You are literally a superhero, and when you aren't being a jerk you are actually really nice and funny And on top of all of that you're gorgeous! So get over yourself and stop acting like a brat!" Max stood up from her spot on the bed and towered over El.

El looked at the girl incredulously. She was stunned, it was difficult to believe the things Max was saying, and that despite her yelling, she was actually being nice. She wasn't a threat to El or her friendships with the boys at all, she was just trying to fit in herself.

"Seriously, I could never replace you and I would never want to. I like you, El. And I want to be your friend too." Max smiled at her.

"I want to be your friend too." El straightened up and smiled back.

"God i'm glad you too are finally over that, it was so lame." Nancy giggled. The three girls fell into a fit of laughter, El threw a piece of popcorn at max, and she threw a milk dud in retaliation.

Suddenly something make into Els mind that had been bothering her for awhile. Something about Max that had always made her burn with envy was her long beautiful red hair, and the way it flowed in the breeze.

"Max?" She asked, suddenly nervous. Max turned to her and raised an eyebrow. "Now that we are friends... CANIDO YOUR HAIR?" She

blurted the last words out after a beat of silence.

Max stared back completely shell shocked. After everything, all this girl had been through, a year of isolation, defeating monsters and saving the world, she was scared to ask if she could braid her friends hair?

"Uh... yeah sure." Max scooted across the floor to sit in front of a trembling El. Nancy rolled off of her bed laughing so hard and practically choked on her candy.

El got to work tugging and pulling the girls long copper hair, twisting it the way Nancy had taught her. Max occasionally winced in pain would El would tug to hard, or would twist a strand to far. El was silent, focusing hard on her work and relishing how beautiful Max's hair was up close. It took almost an hour, and a lot of tries, but El finally got Max's hair into two neat braids.

"I have always wanted to do that." El said, taking a step back to admire her work.

"Really?" Max asked, turning to look in the mirror at her new look. "Well if it means so much to you then when your hair gets to be as long as mine, Ill braid yours too."

El beamed excitedly, eyes wide and content, it meant more to her than Max could know.

"I'm glad we are friends." El said quietly.

"I'm glad were friends too."

### 3. Chapter 3

**So I accidentally posted the same chapter twice! Shout out to rahulkulkarni681 for pointing that out lol! This is the chapter I meant to publish. It's a short one but I think it's really sweet and I hope you enjoy it!**

**Sorry for the mix up!**

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#### 33. "Call on Line 1"

"I am so bored, I think I am actually going to die." Dustin moaned, staring up at the ceiling.

The party had plans to go to the arcade that day, but after a long bike ride they found it closed. They all peddled back to Mike's house, utterly defeated and lost with what to do for the entire rest of the day. They had played some bored games, but between Max and El, there wasn't much competition. Those girls had some serious luck on their sides.

So now they are laying around the basement, staring at the ceiling in silence, praying for something, anything, to do.

"We could start a new campaign." Will offered, trying to sound optimistic.

"No I don't have anything prepared right now." Mike sighed. He was really slacking on his D&D writing. Now that he was allowed to see El, they were together every chance they got.

"We could go on a Bike ride." Max suggested, although she herself did not want to do that at all. She had a hard enough time keeping up with the boys on her skateboard, and riding on the back of Lucas's bike was only fun for so long.

There was a collective 'no' grumbled around the room.

"I actually wish we had a monster to fight or a government agency to take down right now." Lucas said only half joking. Some of the kids

giggle, others just groaned.

"We could..." Mike started, thinking over any and every possible thing six bored teenagers could go on a Sunday in March. "Make a dumb prank call or something." He finally said, he wasn't being entirely serious but everyone sat up, looking at him inquisitively.

"What is a prank call?" El asked, sitting up from her resting place next to Mike on the couch.

"It's when you play a joke on someone over the phone." He answered.

"They are usually pretty stupid, but sometimes you get someone really good." Dustin added.

"Els never prank called anyone!?" Max asked, jumping up excitedly. "Then we have too!"

The kids ran upstairs into the empty kitchen. Mike grabbed the phone book from a cupboard and flipped through it. The boys bickered about who they should call, and what joke they should make. Finally after several minutes of arguing they agreed on the perfect prank, and the perfect victim. They coached El on what to say and handed her the phone. She nervously dialed the number and waited for person on the other end to pick up.

"Hawkins Police Department, this is Flo how can I help you?" Flo answered, smoothly reciting her phone etiquette speech.

"I need to speak to Hopper please." El answered, trying not to giggle. Her friends, however, failed, excitedly chuckling in the background.

Flo raised an eyebrow and huffed. "What is this about?" Of course she knew who was on the other end of the line, she had come to know Jane pretty well over the last few months, but she had never called before.

"It's um..." Some whispering voices argued behind the phone, and someone hissed for them to be quiet. "Important." She giggled.

Flo sighed. "Okay I'll transfer you, please hold." She dialed Hoppers office and waited for him to answer.

"Yeah what's up, Flo?" He answered, scratching his forehead. He really didn't feel like dealing with any errands today.

"You have a call on line 1. It's important." Her voice was flat and laced with sarcasm.

Hoppers brow knit in confusion and he pressed the flashing green button, picking up the 'important' call.

"Chief Jim Hopper." He stated coolly.

A chorus of hushed giggles sounded off in his ear, followed by a very hushed "What do I start with? Oh yeah!"

"Is your refrigerator running?" El asked, trying her best to sound serious, and ignoring her laughing friends.

Hopper stopped dead in his tracks. Was this really happening right now? He felt the corner of his mouth pull up in a strangely proud grin. It was nice to hear his little girl having fun like a normal kid for once.

"Um yes, it is running." He answered, his smile clearly audible.

"Well then... You better go catch it!" El yelled, completely losing her composure and laughing hard. Her friends laughed even harder behind her. She hung up before he could say anything else.

He sat there for a moment, wanting to tell her not to call him at work unless it was serious, but being too tickled by hearing her laugh like that. He didn't hear her laugh that hard very often, and he cherished it everytime it happened. She was a good kid, and he had the feeling prank calls wouldn't become a habit, so he let it slide for now. Grinning to himself on and off for the rest of his shift.

That night when he picked her up, she was beaming as she pulled open the door. They drove in silence for a while, before her curiosity got the best of her.

"So... anything interesting happen at work?" She snickered.

He chuckled dryly, reaching over and messing her curly hair. "Yeah

actually, I got a phone call from a very silly girl and her bad influence friends."

She laughed hard again, the sound making his heart swell. He could see in her eyes that she was genuinely happy for the first time he could remember. She was starting to heal, and starting to become the wonderful and amazing young woman she was always meant to be.

They drove home mostly in silence, but every few minutes he would turn to watch her from the corner of his eyes. She had a thin smile plastered to her face the whole way home. And for the millionth time since he brought her home, he was overwhelmed with the thought that it was the best choice he had ever made.

## 4. Chapter 4

**This chapter was so so fun to write! It is very fluffy and sweet and I hope you all enjoy it as much as I do!**

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### 45. "You look pretty hot in plaid."

El had developed a bad habit.

She likes to steal people's clothes. Well not steal, but borrow. She had worn other peoples clothes for so long out of necessity, that now it just made her feel safe. She would sneak into Hoppers drawers for an oversized t-shirt, or a warm flannel, she would wear one of Mikes jackets home and then just forget to give it back at the end of the night.

It became a pattern that her friends all caught on too right away when their wardrobes were suddenly picked over. So once every couple of weeks she would have to begrudgingly return everything. Dustin's camp sweatshirt, lucas bandana, Max's black high tops, Hoppers various t-shirts, and all of Mike's jackets.

El liked holding onto these items because it made her feel like her friends were always close, even when they were at school all week. It made it easier when the nightmares got bad, or when her flashbacks haunted her while she was alone all day. At first it was sweet, and kind of cute; but now it was just part of the routine. No one questioned when their clothes went missing, and El always returned them eventually.

But now it was the coldest February in Hawkins in over 15 years, and Mikes warmest jackets were all mysteriously missing. He rolled his eyes looking over his nearly empty closet and pulled on a light sweater. It wasn't nearly enough for the bike ride he was about to endure, but it would be worth it.

Mike and El always got to spend sundays together, not every Sunday but almost. He had woken up extra early today, before the sun even rose because he was extra excited for this Sunday meetup in



particular. Because today, Hopper wasn't going to be there.

The police chief was a few towns over at some important law enforcement conference, it was a new year and that meant new regulations. The chief had reluctantly let Mike and El keep their date, and Mike was as giddy as a school girl to have entire day alone with El. Alone time did not happen very often, and he would make good use of every second of it.

The nearly 30 minute bike ride in the bitter cold made Mike feel like his fingers and ears were going to freeze off, but as he walked his bike up the path towards the secluded cabin, he couldn't help but feel warm inside. The sun had just started to rise, casting a golden light over the snowy forest, and shining brightly through the plume of smoke rising out of the cabins chimney. He walked up to the door and knocked the secret knock, that familiar nervous feeling filling his stomach. He wondered if that feeling would ever go away, part of him hoped it never did.

A few minutes passed and the door remained closed, not a single sound coming from inside. He knocked again, slightly louder this time and the locks clicked open one by one. He pushed the door open but found the living room empty.

"El?" He called out, setting his backpack down and closing the door behind him. He heard a faint grubbly reply coming from her room and he chuckled. She was still asleep! "Can I come in?" He asked through the small crack in the door. Another mumbled reply that sounded somewhat like a yes came from behind and he pushed the door open.

El was curled up in bed under two quilts. Her face was smashed against her pillow so that only one foggy eye could look up at Mike. She sat up slowly, stretching and rubbing her tired eyes. Her messy curls stuck up in the back, and she had a smear of dried drool on her cheek. Mike couldn't help but smile. Even like this she was beautiful.

"Its early." She whined, pushing the comforters off of her.

"I know, i'm sorry I woke you up. I was just excited to see you." Mike played with the hem of his shirt nervously. He hoped she wasn't

upset, he knew how cranky she could be without enough sleep.

"S'okay." She mumbled, standing up and walking towards the boy. Mike could now see she was in fact not only wearing his warmest plaid flannel, but she was also wearing one of his t-shirts, and a pair of his sweatpants.

"Excited to see you too." She smiled up at him blearily, wrapping her arms around him in a hug. She jumped back, suddenly startled. "You are so cold!" Her eyes went wide.

"Well it's freezing outside and I biked here. Plus you have my jackets." He smiled wryly at her.

"I'm sorry, I will give them back today." She pulled his hand and led him out to the small wood burning stove in the corner of the cabin. She forced him to sit down in Hoppers chair next to the fire and added a few logs to it. "Get warm, i'll be right back." She let go of his hand and made her way to the bathroom.

Mike listened to the sounds of her brushing her teeth, and he took the opportunity to toast his hands and try to get some feeling back in them. A few minutes later she walked out looking refreshed and radiant. Mike was still often shocked by how lovely she had become. She was no longer sickly thin, or pale, and her hair was getting longer every day, and her eyes seemed content whenever he looked in them.

She was still wearing his old red and black flannel, but she had changed into one of Nancy's handed down dresses. It was light grey with shiny black buttons pinning it together from the bottom to the top. It had a thin red belt at the waist that El had tied in a bow. Her carmel curls were long enough for her to tuck behind her ears with the help of a few white hair clips, and she had washed the drool from her face leaving her skin looking refreshed and glowing. Mike marveled at how... normal she looked. Nancy and Joyce had helped her a lot with getting her clothes she actually liked, and with teaching her how to put together an outfit she felt pretty in. Mike thought she had done a damn good job.

El made her way into the kitchen and pulled out a box of Eggos from

the freezer. She popped them in the toaster and clicked the gas oven on. "Are you hungry?" She asked Mike with a smile.

"Uh, yeah actually I am a little bit, but you don't have to make me anything!" He stood up to join her in the kitchen.

"I want to! Hopper showed me how to cook eggs." She grinned, turning a shade of pink, feeling strangely embarrassed. She got the carton of eggs from the fridge and cracked two into a cast iron pan. Mike was impressed as she scrambled them without incident. Eggs weren't very hard, but it was still impressive to see her cook anything besides eggos and microwave dinners.

She plated up the waffles and eggs and Mike poured them both glasses of orange juice. They sat the table eating in silence for awhile before Mike finally spoke.

"So what do you want to do today?" He asked with a bit more enthusiasm than he had intended. He winced at how much a dork he sounded like. El just shrugged, seemingly unphased.

"Well... I brought over some of my D&D stuff, I thought I could finally teach you how to play!" He waited for her to turn down his offer but instead her eyes went wide.

"Yes!" She beamed, finishing off her last eggo.

"Really!? Cause we don't have to..."

She stood up and grabbed his hand again, pulling him back into the living room. She sat expectantly on the couch, knees pulled up and smile wide. Mike couldn't believe it. How lucky could he be? To have a beautiful girl who was actually interested in learning about nerdy board games? He fished around in his backpack, pulling out various photocopied manuals and a few hardcover books about medieval history and lore he had gotten for christmas.

They spent the next few hours going over the fantastical Dungeons and Dragons universe. Mike was more excited to share this world with her than he had realized. He went off on several dramatic tangents and reenactments. El hung onto his every word, even the

ones she didn't understand. Mike was a, what was the word max always used? A dork. And a big one. But she loved every moment of it. She liked being able to be a part of something that made him happy, and the game sounded fun, if not a little overwhelming.

Somewhere over the course of his explanation El had scooted closer to him to have a better look at the books. At this point she was leaning against his shoulder, he had one arm wrapped around her and was holding the large binder over their laps, gesturing to it with his free hand. Mike was just starting to explain to El what a mage was, and he went over the character sheet he had made for her in the year she was missing. El felt incredibly special to have been thought of as this though, brave, and heroic spellcaster that Mike had written her to be. She sighed, letting her worries flow out of her with her breath and sinking further into his embrace. She felt so safe when she was close to him, it was a feeling she never wanted to go away.

"So... what do you think?" Mike concluded, turning the last page over and closing the binder.

"It's amazing." She breathed. And honestly, it was. El felt her head swim with all of the new information, how anyone could remember all of it was astounding. The picture that Mike had painted seemed amazing, like a fairy tale. It was full of princesses, and fairies, and magic, and monsters too but they were not nearly as scary as the monsters they had faced together in real life.

"I'm glad you think so! I can't wait for you to get to play with us! The campaign we are working on right now takes place in a desolate snowy tundra, and I think I know the perfect way to work you into the story." Mike was practically jumping out of his skin.

"Tundra?" El echoed not understanding the word.

"Yeah it's a really cold place where everything is covered in ice and snow. And there are basically no trees or plants or anything because it too cold for anything to grow." Mike explained, flipping through his campaign notes and showing her a photocopied image of antarctica. "It's full of snow monsters and evil ice wizards. The guys got stuck in a blizzard last time we played, but Will found some enchanted snow resistant armor in a cave and saved them. It was

awesome." Mike was excitedly rambling again.

"It sounds... awesome." El rolled the new word around on her tongue. She had heard the boys use it before but she had never used it herself. It felt fun to say.

"I wish I had that armor now." Mike said motioning to the window. It was snowing outside again and the sky looked chilly and blue.

El frowned, realizing that it was getting late, and that Mike would have to leave soon. Not only that, but he would have to endure the bitter cold all the way home. She shifted out of his arms and stood up, walking in her room.

She came back a few minutes later with a massive pile of laundry in her arms. It had to be at least a dozen jackets, sweaters, and shirts. She dropped them in a heap on the end of the couch and smiled shyly.

"Sorry I kept all of your clothes." She blushed, and reached up to pull off his flannel that she was still wearing.

"Hey no, it's okay!" Mike stood up and pushed the flannel back onto her shoulders. "I like that you take my clothes, it's kind of cute." He grinned at her, his eyes full of warm adoration. El felt her own heart twist, he always looked so pretty when he was embarrassed.

"Plus... You look pretty hot in plaid." Mike added a few moments later. Then, realising what he had just said, his eye shot open wide and he looked down at his feet.

El knew what Mike looked like when he was embarrassed, but she wasn't quite sure what he had meant by his statement. "Hot?" She questioned. His flannel did keep her warm, but that wasn't really why she took it, and she wasn't sure how someone could

warm.

"Uhh... yeah. Hot." Mike shuffled awkwardly, taking a few paces backwards, his face beet red. "It's like another word for pretty, but its... different. I shouldn't have said it." He cleared his throat in the tension.

Els face fell. She shifted from feeling confused to feeling hurt. Mike called her pretty all the time, and he had taught her that gorgeous, beautiful, and cute were all different words for pretty as well, so why was this word different? And why was it wrong?

"Why not?" She asked, eyebrows knitted together in concern.

"Because... because it's not a very nice way to say pretty. It's rude." He played with his fingers, still looking at the ground.

"Not pretty?" El felt her gut stir. She could understand what he was trying to say.

"No! You are so pretty, El! You know that I think you are so beautiful." He stepped forward and grabbed her by both of her shoulders so he could look into her eyes. "And I think you're... hot too if i'm being honest. It's just not a very nice thing to call a girl. Even if it's true." The blush returned to his face, he couldn't lie to her even if it was uncomfortable to admit.

"Why is it not nice?" She felt reassured at flustered grin, but she still didn't understand.

"Ughh..." He sighed, sitting back on the couch and pulled El down with him. Their knees touched as they faced each other. "It just is. It's like really REALLY pretty, but in an... aggressive way, I guess." he couldn't figure out how else to explain it, and her certainly didn't want to have to explain its more

implications.

El bit her lip. So he thought she was

pretty, but it was also aggressive? It clearly made him nervous, and something about the look in his eyes made her chest tighten. Sometimes she thought Mike was so pretty it made her feel almost unsettled too, maybe even 'aggressive'.

"Okay. Hot." She felt herself giggle at saying the word in this context, and she could read the underlying tension in it.

"Yeah..." Mike blushed deeper and bounced his knee the way he so

often did when he was nervous.

"Mike?" El asked putting a hand on his leg to steady it. "You are... hot too." She tried to sound confident but her stomach felt like it was full of bumblebees.

Mike chuckled, obviously startled by what she had said and he grabbed her hand in his own. "Thanks, El. but I can't believe that you think

hot."

"I think you are beautiful, Mike." She said sternly, inching closer to his on the couch. "And smart, and funny, and kind. You make me happy and keep me safe." She looked deeply into his eyes, her face completely serious.

Mikes heart soared. How had he gotten so lucky? Before El no girl would look twice at him, and the ones that did just called him names. But now he was inches away from an absolutely amazing, badass, gorgeous, and

superhero of a girl. And she liked him the same. He leaned forward into her and pulled her into a tender kiss. Every kiss with her felt like magic, and it always left him feeling completely breathless and giddy. He pulled away and leaned his forehead against hers. Their faces were matching in a warm flushed pink.

"You are the best person I have ever met El. I am so lucky that I get to spend time with you, and be your friend and, kiss you." He whispered to her, looking into her eyes so closely that they were blurry.

"No, Mike. I am the lucky one." Her face was serious again, but Mike could see the pain buried deep within them, and the adoration pulling at the corner of her lips.

Mike pulled her into a warm hug. He knew that he would have to leave in a few minutes to be home in time for dinner, but for right now he only wanted to think about El. About the smell of her vanilla shampoo, and the sound of her breath as he hugged her tightly.

"El? Why don't you keep this jacket." He tugged at the hem of it after breaking the hug. "It looks better on you anyway."

"Hot?" She asked with a faint smile, cracking a silly pose.

He laughed hard, her sense of humor always caught him by surprise, she was actually really funny when she wanted to be. "Yes hot."

After a few more minutes of precious alone time, and a couple more small innocent kisses, Mike finally had to pack up his D&D stuff (and all of his jackets) and set out into the cold winter night. He braced himself for the cold, but his stomach felt content and warm. It had been a good day, and the entire bike ride home went by in a blur because his thoughts were racing as he replayed it over and over again.

'I love her so much.'

He thought to himself as he pulled into his driveway. It was a thought that surprised even himself, but he knew it was true. He loved her. More than anything else. And one day he was going to tell her that, but for now he was just trying to get over the fact that he had called her hot, and that she had returned the compliment.



## 5. Chapter 5

Thank you all so much for you lovely comments! Hope you enjoy

-Allie

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134. "Are you scared...Then why won't you look at the screen?"

Summer rolled into Hawkins like a quick stampede. It seemed that over night, the rainy spring days and cool breezes were replaced with scorching sun day, and warm humidity. It was a welcoming season, as the days got progressively longer, and the temperatures rose. It meant that the boys would soon be out of school and be able to spend more time playing D&D, riding bikes without getting rained on, getting summer jobs, and get ready for going to High school in the fall. Most excitingly though, was that summer meant that El was finally allowed out of the house for more than just rare, special occasions.

Hopper had been very firm, that El was not allowed to go out with her friends, or to be seen outside until *at least* a full year after she closed the gate. He was adamant, and unwavering, at first, until the young curly haired girl wore him down. Everyday she begged a little bit harder, and brought it up a little more fervently, and talked about it a little more wishfully. She even got her friends to join in. Soon Hoppers life was filled with teenagers all working together to try to sway his mind.

'I sure wish El could come to the arcade with us.'

'It would be awesome if El could come see us win the science fair.'

'I bet El would love going to the lake, to bad it will be too cold when she is finally allowed out.'

At first it was kind of sweet, and then it was annoying, and then it was infuriating, and then Hopper just wanted it to stop. So he sat El down one night after dinner one night and told her that if she made her friends 'shut the hell up' that she would be allowed to go out at

least once a week starting as soon as the boys got out of school.

She was so excited that she practically broke all of the windows (again) with her screams, and she flew to the phone, dialing her friends phone numbers as fast as her fingers would let her. It was definitely worth the leniency, to watch her be so excited and happy. He wanted her to be able to have a normal, fun summer with her friends. The Lab was as good as a ghost town so surely everything would be fine. So until Summer, El and her friends stopped bringing up her lack of freedom, and instead resolved to annoy Hopper with simply being over as often as possible.

It turned out that Max lived relatively close to El, at least much closer than the boys. So once the two girls had settled their differences they became fast friends. Infact, Max was over at the cabin almost everyday after school. El introduced Max to the world of soap operas, which at first she loathed, but now she was just as invested as El was.

Together the girls would sit on the couch, popcorn in hand, eyes wide, wondering what was going to happen next. Was the ship captain really dead? Was his twin brother evil? Who was the true father to the herisses unborn child?

Max also introduced El to horror movies. At first El had been mortified by the gore, and murder, but eventually it had grown on her. Max helped her understand that they were just stories, and showed her the fun in them. Before long, El was a complete horror movie junky. She could quote almost every line of *The Shining*, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The girls would jump and scream and laugh along with the movies, tossing popcorn at one another.

When Hopper came home in the evening, he never knew if the girls with their eyes glued to the screen, would be obsessively watching a dramatic romance scene, or a bloody slasher film. Hopper himself didn't much care for either, but it made him laugh to think that his adoptive daughter really was a little MTV punk.

El had tried to get Mike invested in her soap operas, but despite his quiet attention at the melodramatic stories, she could tell he didn't care for them. El liked his sci-fi movies a lot, but they weren't her favorite. So she hoped that maybe they could bond over horror

movies instead. She had the perfect plan to get him acclimated to her new favorite movie genre: When she was finally allowed out, she would take him to see one in theaters.

Mike loved going to the movies! He talked about the experience like it was magical, and it was the first thing on El's checklist of fun summer activities. So when Max told her that the highly anticipated 'Day of the Dead' would be coming to the Hawkins theater in early July, she knew it was the perfect way for her and Mike to bond over their shared love on cinema.

When El asked him on a movie date, Mike was over the moon. He had always wanted to be able to share one of his favorite activities with her and it made him ecstatic to know she was just as excited. He didn't know what exactly they were going to see, but he did know it was just going to be the two of them alone, and that made him nervous in the best way possible.

So when the day finally came, and the Police Chief's truck pulled up to his house to take him on his first real date, he flew across the yard and into the car. Since it was only a two-seater they all had to cram together, but El and Mike didn't mind being mushed next to each other on the short drive to the theater. When they arrived downtown, Hopper was quick to get into the rules.

"You are only going to go into *that* theater, you are only going to see *one* movie, you are not going to leave, or walk anywhere else, or loiter around. Do you understand?" He said gruffly, making stern eye contact with both giddy teens.

"Yes!" They both blurted in reply, wanting desperately to get out of the car.

Hop stared at them for a moment longer, and deciding he had tortured them enough, he waved them off. "Okay have fun." They threw the passenger door open and ran across the street at the cinema. "But not too much fun!" He hollered out the open window with a chuckle.

"So what are we seeing?" Mike beamed at his curly haired date as she studied the marquee.

"It's a surprise. Wait here." He smiled slyly, and walked up to ticket booth. Max told her that because the movie was graphic, that kids wouldn't be let inside, so she needed to lie and buy a ticket for something else. Hopper had briefed her on exactly what to do and say when she needed to buy something, and while she was nervous at first it was actually pretty easy.

"Two tickets for back to the future please." She said to the man behind the counter. Mike had already seen that movie in theaters twice, so she knew they would be allowed in. She gave him her money and he slipped her two small pieces of paper with the title on them. She felt strangely proud of herself for already navigating phase one of her plan.

Once they walked inside, Mike offered to buy the popcorn and candy because she had paid for the tickets. He knew that guys were supposed to pay for stuff on dates, or at least that is what Steve told him. El marveled at the room around her. It was so colorful, and it smelled of fresh popcorn and sugary candy. There were a few arcade games lined up along one wall that all chimed and played little 8-bit jingles. There were massive movie posters framed along the walls, and larger than life cardboard cutouts of action stars and superheroes. El understood why Mike talked about this place so fondly, it really did feel magical.

"So do i get to know what we are watching now?" He smirked at El as she dug into the popcorn.

"Yes." She smiled, and led him to the far side of the theater, making sure not be seen by any employees, and pointed to the small sign above the door.

There, in red letters, was the title "Day of the Dead". Mike felt his heart drop into his stomach. He had been dreading this.

He knew that Max had gotten El into horror films, and he secretly hoped she never asked him to watch one. The soap operas he could stomach, they were funny at the very least, but horror movies? He hated scary movies, he couldn't handle the blood, or gore, or screaming, or mangled corpses. He had tried to watch Psycho once with Jonathan and Nancy and he nearly threw up.

"Mike!" Els voice snapped him back to reality, and he realized he had been staring up at the sign in stunned silence. "Are you okay?" She pressed.

"Um... you want to watch a scary movie?" He asked, his brow knitting in concern.

"Yes. They are my favorite." She smiled proudly. "Come on." She pulled his hand into the theater and found a seat near the very back row. It was the only row not full of people.

Normally Mike would have been thrilled to sit alone with El at the movies, but all he could think about was what horror awaited him on screen. They watched through the previews and his breath was already tense in nervous anticipation. Boys were supposed to be tough during scary movies right? So that their girlfriends could curl into them when they got scared. Isn't that how it worked? What was Mike going to do now that his girlfriend was positively relaxed, he was as tense as a wooden board.

He tried, instead, to focus on El, who was cuddled up under his arm, and the fact that their hands kept touching as they reached for the popcorn. Once the opening credits began to roll, and the ominous music began to sweep through the theater, Mike started shaking like a leaf. His knee bounced up and down with anxiety. El noticed his jittering, and tried to settle him by lacing her fingers in his hand, but it really only made it worse.

The entire thing was nauseating. The moaning zombies milling about the streets, the bloodied and decomposing bodies of victims, the anxiety of desperately trying to escape the undead hordes. It was too much, and watching the zombies finally get ahold of, and brutally tear apart one of the characters pushed him over the line. He wanted to get up and go to the bathroom, make some excuse about being sick and just not come back. He just wanted to get the hell out of there, but El was still cuddling against him and gently holding his hand, and he didn't want to just bail on her while she was enjoying herself. So instead, he just shut his eyes.

If he wasn't watching, then he didn't have to worry about the blood and guts splaying across the screen. Sure he could still hear it, but

with his eyes shut he could just focus on enjoying the alone time with his girlfriend. It worked for awhile, closing his eyes, or looking at the ceiling, or down at his hand intertwined in Els.

But after awhile, El took notice.

"Are you scared?" El asked quietly, realizing that he hadn't been watching for sometime, and that he squeezed her hand every time someone screamed.

Mike kept his gaze turned to the side and shook his head. "No! No not at all it's great." He whispered back, swallowing hard.

"Then why aren't you looking at the screen?" She snickered.

Mike turned slowly around to face El, keeping his eyes tightly shut until he was looking at her, not wanting to catch any of what was going on on screen. "I just..." He didn't have a good excuse.

"You are scared!" She said in a harsh whisper, sitting up and smiling. Mike blushed, he had been found out.

"Why are you scared?" Her mouth was turned up at the corners, but she was trying to stay serious for his sake.

"I... don't really like horror movies. I can't handle like... blood and guts and stuff." He admitted, staring at his hands.

El was shocked. Mike had helped her through more dangerous, and honestly terrifying encounters than she could count, and he was scared of a little fake gore? He had always been a hero in her eyes, so brave in the face of danger, even when she couldn't be.

"I'm sorry. I never would have brought you here." El suddenly felt incredibly guilty at making him uncomfortable.

"I wanted to enjoy the things you like with you... but it's just too freaky." He looked back at the screen and scrunched his nose up at the picture.

Els face fell into a frown. "But you are always so brave. And you like movies with fighting." She thought back on all of the long lightsaber,

and spaceship battles she had seen in star wars, and all of the detailed fight scene he had narrated during D&D campaigns.

"Brave!?" Mike asked astonished, earning him a harsh shush from someone a couple of rows ahead. Sure he had gone through hell along with all of his friends over the last two years, but he was anything but brave. He had been terrified the entire time, only doing what he knew *had* to be done to save his friends. "I am NOT brave." He leaned to speak directly into her ear

"Yes you are Mike. You saved my life when I was a weirdo." She recalled the word Lucas had used to describe her all those months ago.

"El, you were not a weirdo. You were a scared kid, we were *all* scared kids and I only did everything because I knew you and Will needed my help." Mike grabbed her hand in his. "I was freaked out the entire time, through everything. It was everyone else who was brave. You, Lucas, Dustin, Max, even Steven."

El was floored to hear Mike speaking this way. To her, he was a hero. He had been the first one to take her in, even when his friends told him he shouldn't, He stayed with her and was patient with her and made her feel safe. When she disappeared he had never forgotten her, not even for one moment. And when Will got sick, Mike stood by his side through everything. Mike always took the lead, and made everyone feel better when things were hard. Mike was brave, even if he didn't realize it.

"Mike you *are* brave. You don't have to like scary movies." She squeezed his hand tightly, her eyes full of affection. He would always be a hero in her eyes, no matter what.

"I really don't like horror movies, El. I would rather watch soap operas." He chuckled, pulling her back to his side.

"Promise?" El giggled

"Yes I promise." He smiled down at her until a blood curdling scream from the screen behind him made him jump. El stood up and grabbed his hand, and pulled him out of the theater into the lobby. Mike was

about to stop her, knowing that she probably didn't want to leave, but he was too relieved to finally be out of there.

"We didn't have to leave. I know you wanted to watch it." He mumbled once safely in the lobby.

"You weren't having fun." She frowned.

"I always have fun when i'm with you." He said smiling shyly, making them both blush.

"I have fun with you too." El told him with a grin. Even though they had to leave the theater, she had still had fun. Just being out of the cabin was exhilarating, and being able to spend time with Mike one on one would always make her heart sore.

They had a little over half an hour until Hopper came to pick them up so they decided to play one of the open arcade games. It actually worked out perfectly, Mike had been wanting to teach El how to play video games for awhile, and now he had the perfect chance. They walked over to the Mrs. Pacman machine in the corner and Mike put a coin into the slot. He played the first round, and tried his best to explain the controls to her, but when she stepped up to play she died almost instantly. She sighed and stepped away from the control panel looking defeated.

"Hey that's okay, no one is good at it their first time." Mike smiled at reassuringly. "And now that you can leave the cabin, you can come to the arcade with us and practice!"

El felt her heart sore at remembering that this was only the first outing of many. She would be able to go to all of the places her friends had told her about. The arcade, the record store, the library, the mall, and hopefully even to school next fall.

"If I had another coin you could try again." Mike sighed. El turned to look at the little flickering screen with disappointment, those few minutes of actual game play had been fun. She focus on the coin slot for a moment, and with a few clanking noises and some slight effort, Mikes quarter popped out of the slot and rolled onto the ground.



"Holy shit!" Mike gasped at her with a huge grin on his face. "You are the coolest person ever." He pulled her into a brief hug before bending down to grab the coin. When he stood back up, El stooped up on her tiptoes to plant a kiss on his cheek.

"What was that for?" He asked blushing.

"I like you." She smiled. "You are my hero, even if you are scared of blood and guts. You are still brave." She giggled.

He kissed the top of her head and hugged her again, much tighter this time. "You're my hero too."

## 6. Chapter 6

**Hello everyone! This is another request from my blog! They wanted a little Lumax drabble, and it was super fun to write. I hope you enjoy!**

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**"If I die, I'm going to haunt your ass."**

In the months that followed the closing of the gate, things finally seemed to calm down. An overall sense of peace returned to the quiet town of Hawkins, and each day seemed just as contentful, if not a little mundane, as the last.

For Max Mayfield, it was painfully boring. She had left the beauty and excitement of California for a town literally in the midst of imploding upon itself. It was the most exciting, and maybe a little scary, thing she had ever been through, but now she was the mayor of snoozeville.

Not if she could help it. She might not have had waves to surf, beaches to comb, or long boardwalks to skate down, but she was going to find some fun in Hawkins even if it killed her.

This was all quite to the detriment of Lucas Sinclair. He had shown her the arcade, the quarry, the junkyard, the lake, and even the creepy cemetery! What more could she want? He was just glad all of his friends were alive, and that no monsters had tried to eat him in four months. But whenever she came around with some idea of what to spend the day doing, no matter how crazy, he just couldn't say no.

That's why he was currently up to his knees in mud in the forest with a particularly giddy red-headed girl.

"Lucas stop complaining!" Max hollered from her perch up on a log. "It's not my fault you have the balance of an old lady." She cackled. They had been trying to cross a creek bed, that was more or less just a swampy sludge puddle at this point, when Lucas slipped in. After Max finally stopped laughing, she offered him a hand and hoisted him back onto the fallen tree she was using as a bridge.

"My balance is not that bad, the tree is just slick." Lucas grimaced, trying to shake free some of the mud from his pants.

"Are you serious? Do you remember when I tried to teach you to skate? I lost count of how many times you fell." She giggled, turning around and skipping across the log with grace to emphasize her point.

"Not everyone can be graceful... ballerina... like you." Lucas stuttered as he stumbled his way across the log, jumping on the other side to join her.

"Good one, stalker." She giggled, punching him lightly in the arm. "Now come on, Steve told me that there is a cool abandoned shack just a little further ahead."

"I don't know why we are going to some weird hut out in the woods. It just going to be full of like broken glass bottles and bums." Lucas scoffed, following behind her on the narrow trail.

"Or maybe we'll find something cool! Like treasure, or a wise old guy, or a dead body!" Max said, turning around with a smirk.

He rolled his eyes and continued forward. Max sure had a strange idea of fun, but Lucas just couldn't say no to her smile. In all honestly, she had a strange ability to make *anything* fun. As long as he was with her, he was having a good time, whether they were studying in the library, or trudging through mud.

After another half hour of walking, the narrow trail gave way to a small clearing. The grass and wildflowers grew tall and straggly, nearly coming up to their waists. In the middle of the field was the shack (if you could even call it that). It looked more like a soggy cardboard box with a blanket of moss for a roof. Its walls hung crooked, leaning forward, its two upper windows looking like sad eyes looking down at the ground below. The door hung open, and swayed back and forth just slightly in the light breeze. Next to the pathetic structure was a magnificent apple tree, or at least it was at one point. Now it was just as dead and twisted looking as the house. Rotten apples littered the ground and roof, some even looking like they had broken holes in the wood from their decent.

"God look at this place. How depressing." Max sighed, stepping into the tall grass. Lucas took a second to marvel at the way her fiery hair looked in the afternoon sunlight. She turned and smiled at him and his heart stopped. She was progressively losing her west coast tan, but her cheeks were still warm and pink, and her smile was still infectious.

"Yeah totally. I cant believe anyone ever lived here." He said, shaking his head from his dopey daydreams.

She crossed the space between the forest edge, and sagging porch steps. She look in through the open door, and shattered windows to see a positively vacant room. Nothing but beer bottles, rotten apples, and a few colorful pieces of trash littered the floor. It smelled musty and wet like mold. She took a hesitant step onto the porch. The wood squished under her feet, splintering apart with a wet thud to the ground underneath.

"AHH! Disgusting!" She yelled, shaking the rotten mush from her shoes. She whipped around to face Lucas with a grimace. "I think the floor will collapse if we try to go in there."

"I told you this was a stupid idea." He teased.

"Whatever, you know it sounded cool." She crossed her arms in defiance. "We just got here a few years too late I guess."

"Yeah a few hundred years." Lucas walked up and tested the strength of the second step, it broke apart just as the first one.

"Well what do we do now?" Max asked, taking a seat on the short cobblestone path that lead up to the porch steps. She reached out and grabbed a tall, yellow flower and pulled its petals off.

Lucas looked around the clearing. They *had* come all this way, and she *had* been so excited, surely there was something interesting to do out here. But he had never been in this part of the woods before. Then his eyes landed on the looming apple tree. Its branches twisting, and knotting themselves up into the air, maybe two or three stories tall and he smiled.

"I'll race you to the top of that tree." He gusted up at its towering branches.

"Um I don't think so." Max scoffed, standing back up and brushing the yellow petals from her jeans.

"Why not? Afraid your going to lose?" Lucas teased, crossing the yard to the trunk.

"No!" She protested, marching after him.

"Then lets race. There isn't anything else to do out here and I bet we can see all the way back to town from up there." Lucas grabbed onto one of the lower branches and swung himself up with ease.

"I... I don't know." Max mumbled, looking concerningly at the branches.

"Wait... You aren't scared are you?" Lucas sneered. "Haven't you ever climbed a tree before?"

"No I'm not scared!" She huffed. "But no. I haven't. There aren't really big trees like this where i'm from, other than palm trees. And I spent all of my time doing stuff that was actually cool." Her voice was layered thick with sarcasm, as usual, but Lucas could hear the underlying discomfort. She really was scared.

"You will have fun, I promise. We don't have to race." He lowered a hand to her with a grin.

She looked at him questioningly, and then at the tree, and then its height. It stretched so tall that it made her feel dizzy. She really didn't like heights, but she wasn't going to let him know that. And besides, for some reason, whenever she was with him, she felt safe. Hell, they had faced a horde of hellish monsters from an unknown dimension together, and yet, when she was with him, it seemed like some sort of crazy adventure, and not like the nightmare it was. So she stepped forward and took his hand.

"Fine. But If I fall, and die, I am going to haunt your ass." She glared. Lucas just chuckled.

"I would never let you fall." He beamed down at her, lifting her up onto the branch.

Slowly but surely they made their way up the tree. Lucas took it one bow at a time, showing her where to put her feet, where to grab onto, how to test which branches were sturdy and which ones weren't. Max actually was having fun, and Lucas was having a blast. She watched his every move with fascination. She couldn't help but giggle at the way his face creased in concentration when he pulled himself up, and the way he explained everything so patiently. He didn't make her feel stupid, the way her step-brother always did, or the way Mike and Dustin used to. He was just genuinely interested in helping her, and talking with her, and experiencing life with her. He made her feel like she was home.

After nearly an hour, and lots of trial and error, then finally reached as high as the branches would allow. Max finally took a moment to take in the view. They really could see all the way back into town, or at least the tops of taller buildings. The trees in the forest were all just beginning to bloom back to life from the spring, and the woods were awash in a rainbow of soft spring pastels colors, and brilliant greens. The sun was low in the sky, making everything look warm and golden. Lucas stared at Max in adoration, she was gorgeous, far more than the view would ever be.

"Max?" He asked, hesitantly, one hand holding tightly to the branch he was standing on, one hand reaching for her arm. She turned around to look at him, her freckles illuminated in the soft yellow light.

"You were right." She breathed, eyes full of astonishment. "This was a great idea. Its so..."

"Beautiful?" Lucas interrupted, finding the word for her because it was right on the edge of his tongue.

"Yeah... really beautiful." She smiled, intertwining her fingers in his.

Lucas felt his chest tighten, the way it usually did when he looked at her, and for the first time he decided that *he* was going to kiss *her*. He leaned forward, careful to keep his balance this time, and placed his

lips gentle on hers. It made his head feel dizzy, and his gut knott itself, but it was the best feeling he had ever felt. It wasn't their first kiss, or even their 10th (he decided that ten is when he should probably stop counting) but each one was amazing. Each one made him wonder what he had ever done to get so lucky.

Max pulled away, her own stomach filling with butterflies and her cheeks turning bright pink. He had never made the move to kiss her before, and she hoped it wouldn't be the last. Everyday that she got to spend with Lucas was a good one, because he was the most genuine person she had ever met. She stared at him in the golden sunlight and giggled, he made her feel like the lovesick idiots she always made fun of. But now she gets it, because when you are with someone special you do crazy, stupid things. Like fighting monsters, barricading yourself inside a junkyard bus, stealing your brothers car, and starting a massive fire in a series of underground tunnels.

Like walking for two hours to an abandoned shack in the middle of the woods, and climbing tall trees even when you are afraid of heights, and kissing nerdy boys at school dances.

## 7. Chapter 7

Hey Everyone, sorry I havent updated in a little bit. I have been working on my new multi-chapter fic 'Bad Brains' and it has really taken up all of my time.

This little oneshot idea came to me in the middle of the night when I couldnt sleep, and I am really happy with how it turned out! Its pretty angsty, but with some nice Mileven fluff sprinkeled in aswell! Its set when Mike and El are like 18/19 and Mike has been away at college for about a year.

Hope you enjoy!

Allie xx

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Mike slams his bedroom door closed hard behind him, hoping to put some distance between himself and the chaos downstairs, but it doesn't help. He can still hear them. Yelling and cursing and stomping back and forth. He heard something shatter when he walked upstairs, but he didn't turn around. He heard Holly sniffing behind her door, but he didn't check on her. It was too much.

His parents were always good at concealing whatever tension they kept between them. Good at keeping up appearances and smiling and ignoring each other, pretending everything was fine. It's not clear, what pushed them over the edge, but something snapped. Now they fight like no one is watching constantly, and nothing is held back anymore. Maybe it's his father's demotion at work, maybe it's his mothers proclivity for wine, but either way, it horrible.

He never knew he would miss their begrudging silence and passive aggression. At least then it was easy to turn a blind eye and act like they were one big happy family.

He doesn't want to cry, so he rubs the skin under his eyes and buried himself deep in the pillows on his bed, trying anything to muffle the screaming. It helps, a little, but he hears something else shatter. He imagines his mothers throwing a plate, or his father knocking her



favorite casserole dish to the ground as he storms into the living room. He buries himself deeper, but he can still hear it, and he hears the static laced voice calling out from his Supercom.

"Mike."

Its El. Of course it is. No one else really uses the old Walkie-talkies anymore, and Dustin and Will are both too far away to be in range now. Off in other cities, living their lives and going to school. God does he wish he never came home for spring break. Then again, that would mean he would be able to see *her* until summer, and that feels so far away.

"Mike, are you there?" Her sounds as haggard as he feels. He crosses the room and extends the antenna

"Yeah i'm here."

"Can you come get me please? I need to see you." He hears her sniffle and he winces.

"I'll be there in five minutes."

El sits outside, waiting for Mike to pull up. He wipes at the tears pooling in the corners of her eyes. The air is cold, and her thin jacket does very little to make her feel any warmer, but she doesn't dare step a foot inside.

All she did was turn the TV off. That's it. It's not her fault Hopper was in a shitty mood. And it's not her fault Joyce is away visiting Will. Doesn't he understand that her powers are part of her? Doesn't he understand that sometimes it's just second nature? Sure she could have gotten up and pressed the button, but he was being crash and she didn't feel like moving. He didn't have to yell. He didn't have to remind her of how much of a freak she is.

Mike pulls up a few minutes later. She can see even in the darkness of the evening that his eyes are red and that his usually cheerful smile is turned into a grimace. She opens the door and steps inside. She feels like a child again, unable to explain or emote how she feels. Right now she just needs distance.

"Drive."

That's all she says. So he does.

Mike pulls onto the highway and speeds off, leaving Hawkins behind, getting into the more remote parts of the county, where the street lights are far and few between. He sees a building that looks new. So much has changed. Everything keeps changing.

His thoughts are racing a mile a minute. Each flashing past just like the mile markers ticking away, taking them further and further from the bullshit with each passing second. He doesn't know what she's thinking. In fact, they haven't said a word since she told him to drive, to take them away. He knows she can be spontaneous, and a part of him worries what that will mean, but when he looks at her, holding his unused hand, he knows that everything will be okay. He would keep driving until they ran out of gas in the middle of nowhere for her. It's always okay with her.

Eventually they leave the endlessly sprawling fields behind, and drive into the depths of the forest. His high beams haven't worked in over a year, but with a nudge of her head, the lights begin to flood the surrounding woods, casting everything in pale white light. He keeps driving still, the switchbacks of the hill take them further up some mountain. It feels like they left only moments ago, but the clock tells him it's been an hour. They forgot to even turn on the radio.

"Pull over." Her voice is distant, but direct. He does as she says, pulling onto the damp dirt of a shoulder turn out.

She gets out of the car without a word. Like she knows exactly where they are going, because she probably does. He isn't exactly sure how her seeking abilities work, but it's never been wrong before. She slowly makes her way forward, into the seemingly dense forest. Her hands are balled at her sides and her long curly hair swishes back and forth with each step. Mike follows close behind.

He stays a few strides behind her. He almost always does now, just from habit. Sometimes when she is angry, she can't quite control what her powers do. Once when they were 14 she sent a tree branch hurtling towards the ground and it knocked him over. If he had been

standing a few feet closer to her then, he might have needed stitches.

He hears her gasp quietly, and when he moves to her side to see what caused it, he gasps too. They are standing on a cliff edge high above the valley. They can see for miles in every direction. He sees Hawkins, and Kurly, and every other little town dotted across the county. Their yellow lights twinkling in the distance like stars, or liquid gold. Its breathtaking, and he feels like somehow she knew that this was exactly what they both needed. She always knows.

They don't say anything for a long time. He moves close to her and holds her waist. She leans her head on his shoulder and wraps an arm around his stomach. Eventually, she is the first to speak.

"Were your parents fighting again?"

"Yeah. It was bad this time. It's so much worse now that Nancy and I are gone."

She nods against his arm.

"Did you and Hop get into it?"

"Yes. He thinks i'm irresponsible. He worries to much."

Mike rests his chin on her head.

A few moments later, she walks from his grip towards the cliffs edge. If he didnt know her better, he might think she was going to do something stupid. El picks up a rock, and throws it as far as her muscles will let her. When she releases it, she screams into the darkness of the night. Like she is throwing away all of her pent up feelings.

Mike thinks that that is probably exactly what he's doing. El is trying to get better at controlling her emotions. It's harder with Mike being gone, and it's always harder when Joyce is away.

Mike walks to the edge of the cliff, and mimics her action. Picking up the biggest, dirties, muddiest rock he can find and sends it careening over the edge. He yells too, but it's almost too thrilling to even hear. It's like the night just sucked the voice out of him, and sent it away

where it can't hurt anymore.

They repeat this process a few more times. Yelling over the cliff, throwing things, laughing when Mickey loses grip of the rock and send it flying backwards into the woods. When they both feel like they can't yell anymore, or maybe when they finally feel like they have gotten out whatever it was that built up inside, they make their way back to the car.

Once inside, they each wordlessly lay their seats back as far as they will go, and cover themselves with the old blanket from their picnic date last week. El reaches up to open the sunroof, through it's opening they can see the moon just brimming over the tree line, and a myriad of stars flickering behind its glow.

Mike always thought the sunroof was a stupid attachment to car that just didn't need it. Sure it was funny when Dustin or Max would stand on the console and yell through it into the air as Mike drove down Main Street. Or that time that Mike forgot to close it, and he and El ended up getting rained on in the middle of a late night make out session. He wished things were as simple now as they were then. Then again, nothing ever really seemed simple. Not for a long time. Not since the night Will disappeared, and his entire life changed. Some things for the better, and some for worse.

Pale moonlight peered through the opening in the roof, marred only by low hanging tree branches and telephone wires. He marveled for a moment on the way they criss-crossed her skin. Washing her in blue and glistening off the tears on her cheeks. It's like she is blanketed in lace. Draped in foliage shadows and stary kisses. He thinks how lucky the moon is so pool on her skin. How lucky anyone is to know her, Because despite every scar and wound, she remains to strong. Temperamental at times, and prone to fits, yes, but so strong.

Something about the night can hide your scars. When it's dark and quiet, everything seems to slow down and fade for awhile. It let's you think.

Sometimes thinking is the problem.

He has been thinking a lot lately. About home, about his parents,

about Holly, about Nancy, about his friends, about El. It's hard being away from her, and that will never change, but their reunions are so magical that a part of him is reminded every time how in love he is.

He thinks back to all of those times in high school when they would sit in his car like this. How they would start to talk, but never got very far in conversation before their hands were all over each other and their laughter replaced the dialogue. Sometimes he misses it, being so young and being able to forget about everything they had been through because nothing mattered but each other and their friends. They were so desperate for each other then, like every second might be their last because it so easily could be.

Not now though.

Now, Brenner is gone, Will is healthy, the upside down is a memory, and El hasn't had any nightmares in almost a year. The future is never certain, but at least now he is certain they will have a future. And it will be a future together. Love isn't the desperation for physical affection or romantic gestures it was when they were kids, because now kissing her, and seeing her is a given.

El doesn't want to think about him leaving to go back to school in a few days. She doesn't want to think about going back home to Hopper. She doesn't want to think about anything but Mike. Her first friend, her first everything.

She feels herself falling asleep in her seat, her hand tangled in his. If she knows Mike, he will drive them back home slowly and quietly so she doesn't wake up when going over potholes or speed bumps.

But he doesn't.

To her surprise, and admittedly to his as well, he falls asleep too. He falls asleep with her hands in his, and her face as the last thing he sees and he smiles to himself, because soon that will be the last thing he sees every night.

And the first thing he sees every morning. Everyday, for the rest of both of their lives. And he thanks some unknown higher power for bringing a scared little girl into his life when he was just a kid out

looking for his friend. He knew even then that something about her was special. He just didn't know that it would be that she was the perfect remedy to fixing all of his broken pieces.

She is the answer to the questions he never knew he asked. Its her.

It's always been her.